

REMARKS

This application has been reviewed in light of the Office Action dated September 7, 2006. Claims 6-9 are presented for examination, of which Claim 6 is in independent form. Claims 10 and 11 have been canceled, without prejudice or disclaimer of subject matter. Claims 6 has been amended to define still more clearly what Applicants regard as their invention. Claim 9 has been amended to change claim dependency. Favorable reconsideration is requested. The canceled claims will not be further addressed herein.

Applicants confirm the election of Group II, Claims 6-11, without traverse.

Claim 6 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Japanese Patent Application Laid Open No. JP 07-015582 (Mori), in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,588,901 (Maclay).

Claims 7-9 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Mori, in view of Maclay and in further view of U.S. Patent No. 4,718,107 (Hayes).

As shown above, Applicants have amended independent Claim 6 in terms that more clearly define what they regard as their invention. Applicants submit that these amended independent claims, together with the remaining claims dependent thereon, are patentably distinct from the cited prior art for at least the following reasons.

Claim 6 is directed to an image communication apparatus including an operation panel having operation keys for making the image communication apparatus perform predetermined operation by being operated. The apparatus includes: (1) a key lock switch for prohibiting an input by operation of at least one of the operation keys; (2) reset judging means for judging whether prohibition of the input by the key lock switch is reset or not; (3) timing means;

(4) appointed time information storing means for storing appointed time information; and (5) appointed time judging means for judging whether an appointed time measured by the timing means has passed or not. When the appointed time judging means judges that the appointed time has passed under the condition that the input by the key operation is prohibited by the key lock switch, the reset judging means judges that the prohibition of the input by the key lock means is reset and the input by the key operation is allowed.

By virtue of the structure recited in Claim 6, users are inhibited from performing a key operation until an appointed time. Specifically, although the input by the key operation is prohibited by the key lock switch, when the appointed time has passed, the prohibition of the input is automatically reset even if a user does not execute a reset key operation. Thus, by conducting a simple operation of appointing a time, anyone can perform a key operation after the time as appointed has passed.

Mori does not teach or suggest all of these features and, from the Office Action, it is understood that the Examiner does not disagree. Mori relates to a facsimile apparatus with a key lock switch which can prohibit use of the facsimile apparatus by anyone other than a specified user. Applicants have found nothing in Mori that would teach or suggest “reset judging means for judging whether prohibition of the input by said key lock switch is reset or not,” “timing means,” “appointed time information storing means for storing appointed time information” or “appointed time judging means for judging whether an appointed time measured by said timing means has passed or not, wherein when said appointed time judging means judges that the appointed time has passed under the condition that the input by the key operation is prohibited by

said key lock switch, said reset judging means judges that the prohibition of the input by said key lock means is reset and the input by the key operation is allowed,” as recited in Claim 6.

Neither Maclay nor Hayes remedies the deficiencies of Mori.

Maclay relates to a device for measuring and regulating the time an electrical appliance is used. The device includes a first counter which can be manually set with a preset time period and a second counter which, when energized, will automatically deduct time from the first counter responsive to the operation of the appliance. When the first counter reaches a zero time setting, the power circuit to the appliance is interrupted thereby preventing further operation. However, Applicants have found nothing in Maclay that would teach or suggest “reset judging means for judging whether prohibition of the input by said key lock switch is reset or not,” “timing means,” “appointed time information storing means for storing appointed time information” or “appointed time judging means for judging whether an appointed time measured by said timing means has passed or not, wherein when said appointed time judging means judges that the appointed time has passed under the condition that the input by the key operation is prohibited by said key lock switch, said reset judging means judges that the prohibition of the input by said key lock means is reset and the input by the key operation is allowed,” as recited in Claim 6.

Hayes relates to an addressable CATV converter in which channels may be locked out. The converter includes two types of timers (WRONG_GUESS_TIMER and LOCK_OUT_TIMER), which time-out for a specified time period when a user inputs an incorrect access code. These timers start when the user inputs the access code, and are used to lock out channels for the user’s viewing. Unlike the present invention, the lock-out is performed for only

the user who enters an incorrect access code. In other words, as long as an access code is assigned to the CATV converter, any person who does not correctly input the access code cannot access the converter. This is clearly different in the technical concept from the present invention in which the key operation is prohibited or allowed to anyone, based on the appointed time. Thus, Applicants have found nothing in Hayes that would teach or suggest “reset judging means for judging whether prohibition of the input by said key lock switch is reset or not,” “timing means,” “appointed time information storing means for storing appointed time information” or “appointed time judging means for judging whether an appointed time measured by said timing means has passed or not, wherein when said appointed time judging means judges that the appointed time has passed under the condition that the input by the key operation is prohibited by said key lock switch, said reset judging means judges that the prohibition of the input by said key lock means is reset and the input by the key operation is allowed,” as recited in Claim 6.

Accordingly, Applicants submit that Claim 6 is patentable over Mori, Maclay and Hayes whether considered separately or in any permissible combination (if any).

A review of the other art of record has failed to reveal anything which, in Applicants’ opinion, would remedy the deficiencies of the art discussed above, as a reference against Claim 6.

The other claims in this application are each dependent from one or another of the independent claims discussed above and are therefore believed patentable for the same reasons. Since each dependent claim is also deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, however, the individual reconsideration of the patentability of each on its own merits is respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and early passage to issue of the present application.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our New York office by telephone at (212) 218-2100. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

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